George SOROS:

I WELCOME THE CHANGES NOW UNDER WAY IN THE USSR

More than six months have passed since September 1987, when the Cultural Foundation of the USSR and the Soros Foundation signed the agreement that established Joint Committee «Cultural Enterprise». But the public at large still knows practically nothing of this new organization. You did indeed give interviews in the newspapers Sovetskaya Kultura, and Novoye Vremya, and Pravda reported your meeting with Andrei Gromyko, the Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet. However the public still lacks specific information. Could you say a few words on the Joint Committee's tasks, its functions and the role which it is to play in the life of Soviet society?

The Joint Committee seeks to support Gorbachev's New Thinking in the cultural field and to encourage individual initiative in Soviet society. The Committee is made up of Soviet

intellectuals acting in their personal capacity who believe in the importance of cultural activities independent of the state. Only the two Co-chairmen are there in an official capacity to make sure that the activities are within the terms of the agreements. The Committee sets policy and supervises the execution of that policy through its subcommittees and Secretariat. If it is succesful, it will play a major role in the development of New Thinking, and provide a model of voluntary organization which acts independently.

What is the financial basis of the Joint Committee?

Dollars are provided by me personally; rouble contributions may come from Soviet organizations who receive grants in dollars. Given our limited financial resources, we have to be very selective and we shall not be able to support all the projects we consider worthwhile.

As a US citizen, you are spending your own money on an organization which has

numerous tasks and aims. As you said in your interview with Novoye Vremya, you act as an altruist and are not to benefit from your activities in the Soviet Union. That's easy to understand, since you preside over a foundation. But it will be Soviet people, citizens of a country which is not your own, who will enjoy the practical achievements of your activity. Wouldn't it be wiser to allocate that money to philantropy in your country? Or do you have some special ideas on the matter?

I wanted to become involved in supporting openness and independence in Soviet culture. I believe that we are all citizens of the world, that we are interdependent and what happens in the Soviet Union is of great importance for all mankind. As a practical businessman, I can use my limited resources much more effectively in the Soviet Union where every dollar counts, than in the United States, where everything is much more expensive.

The members of the Joint Committee are: Yury Afanasiev, Grigory Baklanov, Tenghiz Buachidze, Daniil Granin, Tatyana Zaslavskaya, Valentin Rasputin, and Boris Raushenbakh. Why those people among a great number of Soviet scientists, writers and other public figures? Who selected the members and how was it done?

The members were selected by mutual agreement. I am sure there are many other people who are equally qualified, but I am very proud of the people we selected. The group is well-balanced with a historian, a sociologist, a scientist, a literary critic and three writers. The predominance of writers could be justified in principle by in fact I was influenced by my personal representative, Antonina Bouis, who translates Soviet literature into English.

Who was responsible for working out the programs which are the starting point of the Joint Committee's activity? Could you characterize each of the programs and give their details in brief?

The Joint Committee has selected six major areas of interest. One is the the development of the social sciences in the USSR. We may sponsor scholary competitions and translations. A second focuses on man's materials and spiritual well-being, and is designed to promote the concept of philantropy in human relations. The third is the dissemination of management skills and know-how to raise the efficiency of organizations. It will include foreign training of management specialists. The fourth supports the improvement of economic life and encompasses the education of Soviet legal, economic and commercial specialists in Western firms. A fifth program pays the foreign expenses of Soviet citizens whose activities promote Soviet culture. This program has already brought a variety of cultural figures to the US to do work with their American colleagues. Finally, the Joint Committee holds itself open to receive proposals and initiatives that don't fall into the other five areas.

Will professional groups, or people who share a common interest have the opportunity to set up their own subcommittee? What information should they submit — proposals, ideas, documents? How many people are needed to set up a subcommittee?

No, it is Joint Committee that decides to set up subcommittees.

At first, the practical activities of the Joint Committee will be of interest only to Soviet people. But what about Americans? Can they expect the help of the Committee for trip to the Soviet Union for scientific and general purposes? When will these activities begin?

Generally speaking the Joint Committee will not support Americans because they have much easier access to dollars.

But it will support Americans while they are in the Soviet Union if doing so makes a contribution to Soviet society.

For instance, we are supporting

Earthwatch who will organize several joint expeditions to sites in the Soviet Union and the United States. Also, Seymour Papert, an American computer expert, will be visiting the Soviet Union this June to set up his Omega Project on computer education in Soviet schools.

Are Americans informed about the creation of the Joint Committee? What is their opinion? Are there any people who oppose your idea of spending money on that instead of something else?

We are advertising in America for organizations who wish to invite Soviet individuals and promise to take good care of them. Our Travel Program has been embraced enthusiastically not only by the academic community, but by groups as varied as the International Film Festival in Washington, D.C., an art gallery in California, and a religious organization in New York. On the whole, people are very pleased to discover that they can invite people on an individual basis. It is a welcome change from the stilted

contacts that characterized so many official delegations in the past.

In response to Sovetskaya Kultura's question, «Why did you decide to cooperate with the Soviet Union?», you said that you welcome the changes now under way in the USSR — perestroika, glasnost, and democratization. Do you think the Joint Committee will be able to play an effective role in these processes?

I think that it is very important that Mr Gorbachev's initiative should receive a positive response from abroad.

I am a supporter of the New Thinking, which I defined in my recent conversation with Mr Gromyko as a situation in which people are encouraged to think but are not told what to think. I believe the Joint Committee shares my point of view. The best way I can support the new thinking is to allow a group of Soviet citizens to formulate to policies of my foundation without dictating what those policies should be. The Joint Committee, in turn, seeks to function

with the greatest possible involvement of Soviet Society.

It will invite applications and make awards on a competitive basis.

It's known that you prefer not to discuss political issues. Nevertheless, the founding of the Joint Committee reflects changes (for the better) in the two powers' foreign policy. So it would be interesting to know whether you would have taken this step if these changes had come about without Soviet-American Summits? To put it another way, what importance do you attribute to the meetings between Mr Gorbachev and Mr Reagan — the Washington summit last December and the upcoming one in Moscow — for the development of business and cultural contacts between the two countries?

It was Gorbachev's invitation to Sakharov to resume patriotic work in Moscow that prompted me to start the foundation, not Gorbachev's meeting with Reagan.

Nevertheless , I consider the summit process very important for the future of the world. It will also help the development of business and cultural ties between the USSR and the United States.

If Soviet-American relations regress to the situation in the early 1980s (and let us hope that they will not), what would you do? Would you refuse to cooperate with the Soviet Union, or would you try to do everything possible to ease tensions? And do you believe such a situation could come about?

I established the foundation as a private individual and my actions are in no way tied to American policy. But I realize that we can be much more successful in an atmosphere of mutual trust and friendly relations. I hope that the activities of the foundation will support and contribute to that atmosphere. It is hard to predict what the future will bring because the situation is very fluid. That is why I consider the foundation worthwhile. If

the outcome is assured, then why make an effort?

The Soviets sincerely seek a strengthening of mutual understanding with Americans. This aspiration is based on their strong belief that people in the US also want to live in peace, to love, to bring up their children... The older generation remembers our common fight against fascism in World War II. Young people, with the great enthusiasm typical of their age, long for new aquaintances, for friendship with young Americans. Are Americans ready to believe that Soviets are reliable partners in the development of science, education, culture, and in strengthening of international security and simply good neighbors?

Soviet-American relations have a checkered past. We will have to work hard to build up mutual trust. There are many people blinded and misguided by dogma in both countries and we

have to prove them wrong. The best way to do so is to produce positive results.

> *The Joint Committee's tasks and aims are new in principle for Soviet society. Do you believe that it will be successful? What in particular makes you optimistic? Do you expect any problems which could brings matters to an end?*

I expect many problems because what we trying to do is without precedent. But in fact that it is unprecedented is precisely what makes me optimistic.

MISPRINTS

page 4, line 21
instead of:
"...by in fact..."
please read:
"...by the traditional importance of literature in Russian society but in fact..."

page 8, line 27
instead of:
"...my..."
please read:
"...the..."